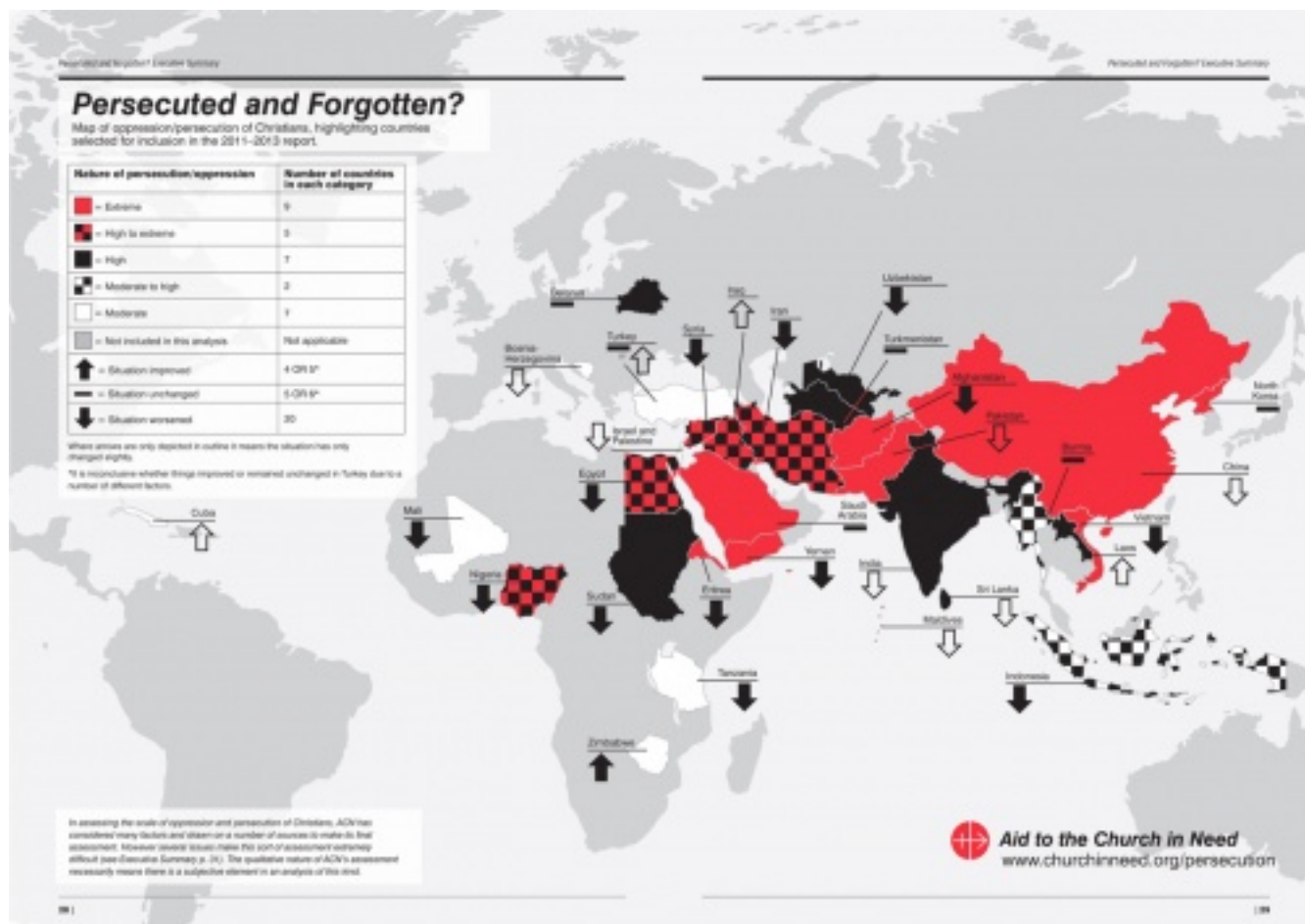


Worldwide Christian persecution a growing trend, report shows



New York City, N.Y., Mar 19, 2014 / 04:07 am (CNA/EWTN News).- In a recently-released summary report called “Persecuted and Forgotten?” Aid to the Church in Need has revealed a worldwide growth in discrimination against Christians in scope and frequency.

The persecution of Christians “has increased over the last 10 to 15 years,” said Ed Clancy, director of evangelization and outreach at Aid to the Church in Need, in an interview with CNA last month, adding that “persecution has many faces, unfortunately, and many places.”

Since there is no single threat to Christians across the world, he said, but myriad forms of oppression, “it might become more incumbent on the Catholic Church, and Christians in general, to be aware of the many dangers that Christians face in the world ... in other places (than the U.S.) they’re facing many, many challenges.”

Late last year, the international charity issued “Persecuted and Forgotten?” as a nearly 200-page report. The executive summary, which can be read in full here, condenses the information found there into a concise 32-page booklet.

“It’s a matter of delivering it in a format and in a size that allows people to get a good grasp of what’s happening, and to perhaps seek more information,” Clancy explained.

While it may be easy to focus on the oppression of Christians in such places as Syria and Nigeria, the phenomenon is not restricted to the Middle East, the report shows.

“There are place where communism unfortunately is still in control, like Vietnam and Cuba,” he noted. Citing Vietnam as a country unlike “more radicalized places like Iran” where Christians face overt persecution, “there they use bureaucratic red tape, and the power of the government, to control and limit the Church, and essentially bother people.”

“In Vietnam, we have a lot of seminarians, or seminarian candidates, and they could spend 10-15 years waiting to enter seminary while the government reviews their application,” Clancy said.

“That’s something unheard of here in the West: we don’t think of a young man saying, ‘OK, I want to become a priest,’ and then waiting for the IRS and the treasury department to approve them before they can even submit the application. That’s what it’s like in Vietnam.”

He also noted Venezuela, where there is yet another sort of persecution: “they might attack the Church or Church leaders because they speak out against tactics the government is using.”

Also in South America, Clancy pointed to Colombia. “Of all the aid workers in the world who were killed, almost half were killed in Colombia,” he said, saying “there, the attacks are mainly because of drugs and politics,” citing the prominence of drug cartels.

Clancy also focused on de-Christianization “in the Middle East and parts of Africa,” where Christians

are emigrating in the face of militant Islamists.

In his forward to “Persecuted and Forgotten?” Gregorios III, Melkite Greek Patriarch of Antioch, wrote that “Christ is on the Cross still, sharing in the pain that the people of God undergo. In all the countries around the world where Christians suffer for their faith, Our Lord is persecuted too.”

The report’s importance is in providing information to spur both prayer and action on the part of Christians who enjoy religious freedom.

“Unlike so many of our brothers and sisters in Christ around the world, we are in the fortunate position to be able to express our opinions and views freely. We can stand up for our rights,” the document notes.

“However, persecuted and other suffering Christians do not always have the freedom to stand up for theirs. That is why Christian communities who live in fear need our help to stand with them and speak up for them.”

The text also highlights North Korea as the most restrictive country in the world for Christians; Christian villagers forced from their homes in Laos; and the disappearance of underground Catholics in China.

“Encouraging prayerful support for the suffering Church is one of the key strands of Aid to the Church in Need’s mission,” the report concludes. It encouraged readers to “select a country or person to pray for – especially during Lent.”

Carl Bunderson - CNA